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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JERUSALEM 002205

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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE. NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/WATERS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/25/2017

TAGS: [KWBG](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [KPAL](#) [IS](#)

SUBJECT: PA CALLS FOR INQUIRY INTO KETZIOT PRISON RIOT

REF: JERUSALEM 2156

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. On October 22, one thousand Palestinian prisoners rioted at Ketziot Prison in response to a search by Israeli Prison Service (IPS) officials for cellular phones. PIJ member Muhammad al-Ashqar was killed, and nine Palestinian prisoners and 15 IPS officials were wounded. On October 23, Palestinian prisoners staged a hunger strike in Israeli prisons and families demonstrated in the West Bank and Jerusalem. The Ministry of Prisoners' Affairs called for an international inquiry into events at Ketziot. PA President Mahmoud Abbas, the PLO, the Palestinian Prisoners' Club, and Hamas condemned the events. End Summary.

Riot at Ketziot Prison: One Prisoner Dead

¶2. (C) According to Deputy Minister of Prisoners' Affairs (MoPA) Ziad Abu Ein and local press reports, one thousand Palestinian prisoners rioted at Ketziot Prison in the Negev on October 22 at 0200 local time in response to an unannounced search by Israeli Prison Service (IPS) officials for cellular phones. (Note: Ketziot holds approximately 2,500 Palestinian prisoners. End Note). Palestinian prisoners threw vegetables and rocks, torched several tents, and used bed parts as clubs to attack IPS officials, wounding 15 Israeli guards. Over 500 IPS officials sprayed tear gas and fired rubber bullets at the crowd, killing Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) member Muhammad al-Ashqar and injuring nine prisoners, who were subsequently hospitalized in Be'er Sheva. Over 200 prisoners suffered from minor injuries due to tear gas inhalation. After forty minutes, the wardens suppressed the riot.

¶3. (C) According to Abu Ein, tensions remained high at Ketziot on October 23 following reports that imprisoned PIJ leadership at Ketziot would be relocated to prisons throughout Israel. Palestinian sources told ConGen political specialist that IPS officials canceled all Palestinian family visits to Israeli prisons scheduled for October 23. Palestinian prisoners staged a hunger strike in protest, and prisoners at Ketziot announced they will continue the hunger strike until a board of inquiry is formed to investigate the incident. On October 23, hundreds of family members of Palestinian prisoners demonstrated throughout the West Bank, including over 200 in Manara Square in Ramallah. In Bethlehem, demonstrators marched to Rachel's Tomb where they threw stones at IDF soldiers. The situation was calmer on October 24, after the IPS reportedly announced that PIJ members will not be relocated to other prisons.

¶4. (C) Initial reports from MoPA employees indicate that al-Ashqar died from a close-range, direct hit to the head, either from a rubber bullet or a tear gas canister. An

autopsy was conducted, but results were not released publicly. A funeral will be held in Tulkarem on October 25 and demonstrations are expected throughout the West Bank. On October 25, prisoners at Ketziot continued their hunger strike and in Gaza PIJ members held a vigil for al-Ashqar, who was due to finish his prison sentence in three months.

PA Reaction: Call for an International Inquiry

¶ 15. (C) On October 22, Nabil Abu Rudeineh, spokesman for PA President Mahmoud Abbas, condemned the incident at Ketziot and described it as "barbaric." PA Minister of Prisoners' Affairs Ashraf al-Ajrami told press that "instead of cooperation and the release of thousands of prisoners, we get dozens of injured ones." On October 24, Abu Ein and MoPA employee Ali Dakhil Allah told ConGen political specialist that the head of IPS contacted al-Ajrami to schedule a meeting to discuss the incident. Al-Ajrami, however, requested that he be permitted to visit Ketziot to talk with the prisoners before meeting with IPS.

¶ 16. (C) Abu Ein and Allah also said that the PA MFA will invite diplomats to Ramallah to discuss Israeli prison conditions and the Ketziot incident. On October 25, the MoPA released a statement calling for an international inquiry into the incident and expressing concern that Israeli restrictions on Palestinian prisoners "undermine the opportunity to revive the peace process ... and weaken the President and the Palestinian government." According to the document, the IPS and Palestinian prisoners have agreed that prisoners will be notified before nighttime searches. According to the MoPA, this agreement was violated on October 22 when the IPS neglected to notify prisoners before

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searching their tents. (Note: This agreement is mentioned in the MoPA document, but has not been confirmed publicly by the GoI or the IPS. End Note).

ICRC Investigation

¶ 17. (C) International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Coordinator Eloi Fillion told Poloff October 24 that ICRC plans to visit Ketziot this week.

WALLES